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AUTHOR	Thomas, William G.
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ABSTRACT

Summaries of five keynote addresses and proceedings of task forces of a conference on postcompulsory education in the 1980s, attended by educational theorists and planners from 30 nations, are presented. The opening address by Lord Asa Briggs provided a worldwide overview of postcompulsory education, and Burton Clark spoke about academic coordination of postcompulsory education. Urban Dahllof addressed the topic of "recurrent education" and indicated that sharp distinctions between secondary and higher education would fade in the future. Lord Vaizey spoke about the subject matter of postcompulsory education in the coming years, and Gordon Oakes suggested that the walls of elitism of the universities be removed, without diminishing the quality, to break the barriers between them and other legitimate institutions. The task force on postcompulsory structures primarily considered national educational systems. The task force on education and the working life recommended that postcompulsory institutions assume the leadership in helping to solve socioeconomic problems through new models and research, and the task force on student learning considered the processes and outcomes of learning. The group on staff development considered reorganization, realignment or closure of postcompulsory institutions, changes in student populations and diminishing resources. The group on media noted the utilization of television and radio broadcasting and print media by England's Open University and the distance learning networks of Australia and New Zealand. Priorities of postcompulsory education were discussed by the task force on priorities. (SW)

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Wm. G. Thomas
October 1978

THE 1980s AND POST-COMPULSORY EDUCATION

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Tighter budgets, older students, more vocationally-oriented education, and the formation of new organizational structures were among the predictions made for the 1980s as two hundred and fifty educational theorists and planners from thirty nations conferred at England's University of Lancaster Fourth International Conference this past August. The purpose of the gathering was to identify directions of learning and to study clues from current trends which may influence the nature of education in coming years. Delegates, largely from the United Kingdom and nearby Western European countries, also included representatives from the commonwealth nations, the United States and Canada, with a sprinkling from Asia and Africa.

Sorely missed for an "international" conference was richer representation from the Third World and any representation from Eastern Europe. The presence of these missing persons might well have skewed, in a much different fashion, some of the prophecies made.

To a non-Britisher attending his first conference of this nature, the polite wit and graciousness of our host colleagues (roses in the lapels of officials, rather than badges; indoor plants in lecture auditoriums; tea times; and intermittent "wetting downs" in the University's several pubs) were all added treats. The pleasantries tended to outweigh the endless reading

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of papers rather than induced dialogue, the absence of visual and audio aids (which would have benefitted the major presentations), our cold dormitory rooms, and a prohibitive conference cost, particularly in light of the withering 1978 American dollar.

Five keynote speakers set the tone: Gordon Oakes, the U.K.'s Minister for Education and Science; Lord Asa Briggs, recently named to the post of Chancellor of England's Open University (OU); Professor Burton Clark of Yale University; and Professors Urban Dahllof, University of Uppsala, and Lord Vaizey of Brunel University.

Between the major presentations, conferees were divided into task forces which considered the futures of learning systems, relating work to education, staff development, media utilization, and new organizational structures in education. The group discussions were centered around papers which selected participants had been invited to prepare.

Lord Asa Briggs, Worchester College, Oxford

Opening the conference with the enormous task of providing a worldwide overview of post-compulsory education, the deservedly renowned Lord Asa Briggs met the challenge. He suggested that post-compulsory education could be considered within five clusters: higher education through which study led to a degree; education in preparation for a vocation; adult education; leisure education; and education divided into particular age groups such as senior citizens.

Cautioning his colleagues to be historians before they

became futurists, Briggs questioned how colleges and universities could become intellectual service stations with a constantly lowering economic base. He warned against the prematureness systematizing of higher education such as had occurred in California, where a rapid and erratic transition caused by a taxpayers' revolt known as Proposition 13 created havoc in colleges and universities. He suggested that large educational systems were becoming more prescriptive than descriptive through their centralization and increased political power. "A new consumerism exists," said Briggs. "We should consider the roles and needs of those benefitting from post-compulsory education instead of designing integrated systems to satisfy the fluctuating vested interests of guilds, unions, faculty and administrator associations, and the politicians in power."

Why have international educationalists been talking about post-compulsory education instead of higher education? Briggs contended that several factors produced this switch in concentration: the demographic changes of fewer people in the traditional higher education age group, and increasing numbers and interests in education by those in higher age brackets; a malaise about educational institutions not being treated as community resources; new attitudes about work and leisure influencing the idea of education for life; a reassessment of education and social need in light of social criticism and consumerism; pressure from those disgruntled about their own higher educational experiences; and the constant and fickle fingertapping from state and national governments.

The new Chancellor made his own predictions about what might occur in the 1980s. Among the possibilities, he felt that educational systems might develop spontaneously as a result of separate, uncoordinated initiative. If educational activities can be wrestled away from political influence, current systems could also be strengthened and coordinated, Briggs suggested. He even envisioned the possibility of the creation of comprehensive networks of adult education.

Lord Briggs concluded that the most likely model would be to concurrently address efforts towards national priorities, while still enriching current systems.

Burton Clark, Yale University

Clark, who was to speak about academic coordination of post-compulsory education first cleverly imagined himself as a Martian educational representative seeking to collect ideas on the planet Earth which might be useful on Mars. His brief visit turned into a confused, never-ending nightmare as he exhausted both his Martian "out-of-state" travel budget and himself, attempting to decipher catalogs and to understand autonomous faculties of specialists who had created their own subcultures, while participating in "organized anarchy." Clark opined that post-secondary, post-compulsory education had ". . . a hopeless set of tasks," that ". . . an inward-looking, fragmented, inter-institutional system with loose external intra-institutional systems of organization would have to be better managed in the 1980s to survive. Or else, the whole world might be forced to teach the six 'R's" currently prevalent in the United States:

readin', 'ritin', 'rithmatic, and r'medial readin', 'ritin', and 'rithmatic."

How should post-compulsory education be organized? Clark suggested that one method was through bureaucracies, but he challenged the bureaucracies, saying that they created rules and specialists in the name of efficiency. Ever-centralizing, these agencies tended to increase staff people, layering or piling one level on top of another, fattening jurisdictions, thus increasing both people and rules. He also warned of the desire for centralization in state control by education officials pitted against the continued pull for "home rule."

"Post-compulsory education could be organized by the professions," Clark stated. However, he believed that faculty senates were currently becoming less powerful than disciplinary groups; that educational administrators could now muster more support than senior professors. "Political influence by public officials and special interest groups has also increased," said Clark. He suggested that the involvement of one-party regimes, trade unions, and "party politics," particularly evident in Europe, are all recent entries in the arena of control seekers.

"Organizing by markets is another possibility," the Yale Professor stated, including the student, labor and institutional markets. "More and more consumers will have to pay tuition and this will necessitate an increase in financial assistance. Students will exercise their influence by voting with their feet. The labor market of faculty and administrators demands lifelong employment through organizing into collective bargaining

agencies, unions, and associations. The Universities of Tokyo, Oxford and Cambridge, and France's Grande Ecole also reflect a market of various enterprises sitting astride the entire structure creating, guiding, and monopolizing options for certain types of students."

With the conditions of both centralization and decentralization coexisting, Clark suggested that participants watch the "market creep" challenge the concepts of central control and shared control. Clark concluded that we must continue to look outside post-compulsory education for variations in types and forms of organizational models.

Urban Dahllof, University of Uppsala

Professor Dahlloff addressed the topic of "recurrent education" indicating that sharp distinctions between secondary and higher education would fade in the future. He said that political pressures were causing a redistribution of educational opportunities to provide equal access to everyone. He cited his country's recent integration of post-compulsory education by pulling all educational organizations together under national and regional boards. "Dissatisfaction is a common denominator in considering post-compulsory education," Dahlloff claimed. He felt educational planning and evaluation should not dwell on the views of politicians, but on what was happening to the participants in learning. He suggested that each nation design its own systems and ways of doing things, looking at the short- and long-term effects simultaneously, and basing concerns on the responsibility to provide opportunities for people to develop

both occupationally and socially.

Lord Vaizey, Brunel University

What will be the subject matter of post-compulsory education in the coming years? This was the primary dilemma presented by the head of economics at Brunel University. He cited the self-doubt of academics as to which disciplines were actually necessary, and the crises of youth unemployment, along with the "too-close" relationship of education and politics as contributors to the confusion.

"We can no longer escape the basic questions of what students want to learn, what they ought to learn, and how they should be taught? If we don't settle these we shall be no more than a network of self-interest, pressure groups," Vaizey advised. He urged those in attendance to help to change the structures and courses to enable students from "unaccustomed groups" to gain entry to education.

Gordon Oakes, Minister of State at the Department of Education and Science

Mr. Oakes suggested that the walls of elitism of the universities be removed, without diminishing the quality which they protected, to break the barriers between them and other legitimate educational institutions. He encouraged broader acceptance of students at entry, and articulation between post-compulsory educational institutions.

Commending the rise of colleges of further education in England and the success of the community college movements in North America, Oakes contended that adult education provided a

golden opportunity to bring about continuing and lifelong learning. With the seeds of further education already in existence, Oakes felt that a larger vision could enable them to grow into a "coherent, though still richly varied garden."

Conference Task Forces

Meanwhile, in the conference trenches, the task force groups caucused in what the London Times reported as "a slightly incestuous manner." Each of the six study groups met for approximately ten hours to discuss the research papers submitted for consideration. It was collectively realized that higher education has lost its long respected laurels. Prevailing questions which overrode the task force sessions included: Where are the opportunities for eager school leavers? How does education create new clients? From whence will come the sources essential for economic growth? Will intellectualism be radical or conservative in the 1980s? Will freedom of choice minimize education's ingredients to the condition of a mushy pablum? What lessons can we learn from one another?

Post-compulsory structures. This task force primarily considered national educational systems, grouping them into three different types: a trinary system, such as that of Australia with universities, polytechnics, and other post-compulsory institutions within separate arrangements; the dual structure of universities and polytechnics coexisting with colleges of further education as found in the U.K.; and the single organizational system which is followed in Canada.

Admittedly, there were many variations of such schemes. The group concluded that the restrictions of students remaining at one institution for an entire academic life was diminishing with greater movements of students from one college to another or into another network through articulation. The task force suggested that political forces in education and state regulatory agencies were forcing organizational changes. The group found it difficult to compare systems and to consider transplanting, but encouraged the sharing of program models, conceptual designs, and contemporary thinking.

Education and the Working Life. This group recommended that post-compulsory institutions assume the leadership in helping to solve socioeconomic problems through new models and research. They noted an increase in demand for more pragmatic education for less money, as well as a necessity to continuously evaluate the productivity of both work and non-work.

Student Learning. This group considered the processes and outcomes of learning. They contrasted traditional learning styles with new approaches, such as experiential education, while looking at the contextual frameworks of learning, design of content presentations, organization of educational units, and teaching styles. They suggested that the quality of the future learning outcome be continuously studied, and that students need personal perspective or affective experience to enable them to better perceive their own situations and to exercise cognitive skill.

Staff Development. Reorganization, realignment or closure

of post-compulsory institutions, changes in student populations, and diminishing resources all suggest that those who hold the reins of such institutions will have to change. Considerable concentration will have to be placed on the renewal, and on re-tooling faculty, administrators, and staff. The irony of educational institutions reeducating their own personnel is an example of a new responsibility for post-compulsory education.

Media. The success of England's Open University and the distance learning networks of Australia and New Zealand in utilizing television, radio broadcasting, and print media for educational purposes was acknowledged by this task force. They also explored the distance learning being utilized in Third World countries as they organize their post-compulsory institutions to meet the direct needs of the greater society. Especially noteworthy were the advances in solving some of the problems of literacy and numeracy through broadscale media saturation, combined with individualized and group tutorials.

Priorities of Post-Compulsory Education. Within a framework of shifting demographies, unemployment and differing economies, priorities of the 1980s, though not ranked in order, included: new access goals to open education for new audiences, new learning proposals to meet societal needs, institutional renewal, rejuvenated institutions, distance learning, inter-institutional cooperation, student mobility between institutions, and continued research. This task force warned, with guarded optimism, that underlying crises would be ever existent. They agreed with the conference speakers that the lessening of the

esteem and mystique of higher education, public suspicion of faculty, unions, et al., difficulties in adapting to change, and the lack of definition of the components of post-compulsory education were all among the realities to be confronted.

As is the case with most conferences, the hallways, patios, lounge areas and meal rooms were where the real value of the meeting was realized. "Hows" and "how to's", rather than "whys" and "why nots", were exchanged, along with addresses and promises of correspondence and visits.

The conferees realized that today's questions were different than those which were asked about the 70s, but there was considerable uncertainty about the answers. For many, retreat into the shell of steady state would have been more comfortable, although the need for creative planning and coordination of resources came through "loud and clear." As was stated in a London Times editorial: "These were not answers certainly to the new questions for higher education but they were perhaps the raw material from which answers could be fashioned."

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*The Times Higher Education Supplement, September 8, 1978, page 2.